

Message Text

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SUBJECT: NORWEGIAN OFFICIALS CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC OVER

FUTURE OF KEFLAVIK BASE

REF: (A) REYKJAVIK 325 (B) OSLO 708 (C) OSLO 502 (EXDIS)

BEGIN SUMMARY. NORWEGIAN FOREIGN MINISTER FRYDENLUND AND STORTING
PRESIDENT GUTTORM HANSEN HAVE RETURNED FROM THEIR RESPECTIVE
VISITS TO ICELAND SOMEWHAT HOPEFUL THAT THE BASE ISSUE WILL BE
SATISFACTORILY RESOLVED. BOTH HAVE THE FEELING THAT A LOVERNME T
CRISIS IS A VERY REAL POSSIBILITY. THEY VIEW THE SIGNATURE
CAMPAIGN IN ICELAND AS AN INDICATION OF THE
DIFFIULTY THE GOVERNMENT WOULD FACE IN DECIDING TO
ASK THE ALTHING TO TERMINATE THE BASE AGREEMENT, AND HANSEN
IN PARTICULAR STRESSED HIS BELIEF THAT THE ALTHING WOULD NOT
APPROVE SUCH A DECISION. IN HANSEN'S VIEW, THE US SHOULD
PURSUE A WAIT-AND-SEE POLICY AT PRESENT. END SUMMARY.

1. FRYDENLUND TELLS ME THAT IT WAS DIFFICULT DURING HIS
FEBRUARY 17-20 OFFICIAL VISIT TO BRING UP THE BASE QUESTION
IN WZPUBLIC" SESSIONS BECAUSE COMMUNIST MEMBERS OF THE
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GOVERNMENT WERE ALWAYS PRESENT, BUT THAT--DESPITE

PUBLIC STATEMENTS TO THE CONTRARY--HE DID FIND OPPORTUNITIES TO DISCUSS THE NORWEGIAN POSITION ON KEFLAVIK WITH THE FOREIGN MINISTER AND, BRIEFLY, WITH THE PRIME MINISTER BEFORE THE LATTER DEPARTED FOR STOCKHOLM. FRYDENLUND IS CONVINCED THAT HE FOLLOWED THE WISER COURSE IN NOT BRINGING UP THE SUBJECT IN A BROADER FORUM IN ICELAND. HE POINTS OUT THAT, IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE NORDIC COUNCIL MEETING, THE LEFTISTS WERE OBVIOUSLY WAITING FOR AN OPPORTUNITY

TO RENEW THEIR CLAIMS OF NORWEGIAN INTERFERENCE. ASIDE FROM THAT, HE THOUGHT IT IMPORTANT TO USE THIS FIRST OFFICIAL VISIT TO ESTABLISH A CLOSE RELATIONSHIP OF CONFIDENCE WITH HIS ICELANDIC COUNTERPART SO THAT IN FUTURE CONTACTS HE CAN HANDLE SUCH ISSUES INFORMALLY. HE THINKS HE SUCCEEDED IN THIS AND MENTIONED THAT THERE WILL BE CLOSE CONTINUING CONTACT BETWEEN THE TWO MINISTERS AND THEIR MINISTRIES. FRYDENLUND HIMSELF WILL RETURN TO ICELAND WITH THE KING IN JUNE AND AGAIN IN SEPTEMBER FOR A NORDIC COUNCIL MEETING.

2. AS FOR FUTURE PROSPECTS, FRYDENLUND POINTED TO THE SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN NOW UNDER WAY AS AN INDICATION OF THE DIFFICULTY THE GOVERNMENT WOULD FACE IN DECIDING TO TERMINATE THE BASE AGREEMENT. HE THINKS IT QUITE LIKELY THAT THE PRESENT ICELANDIC GOVERNMENT WILL FALL (HE HAD THOUGHT LAST WEEK'S GENERAL STRIKE MIGHT DO THE TRICK) AND BE REPLACED BY A MINORITY COALITION FROM WHICH THE COMMUNISTS WOULD BE EXCLUDED. SUCH A COALITION WOULD GOVERN WITH TACIT SUPPORT IN THE ALTHING FROM THE PRESENT OPPOSITION PARTIES.

3. GUTTORM HANSEN, PRESIDENT OF THE PARLIAMENT AND AN EXPERIENCED LABOR PARTY POLITICIAN, ALSO OFFERED TO BRIEF ME ON THE EARLY FEBRUARY SEMINAR ON SECURITY IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC IN WHICH HE PARTICIPATED, AND I CALLED ON HIM FEBRUARY 26 FOR THAT PURPOSE. WHILE UNWILLING TO PREDICT HOW EVENTS WILL UNFOLD, HANSEN IS QUITE CERTAIN A GOVERNMENTAL DECISION TO TERMINATE THE BASE AGREEMENT WOULD FAIL OF A MAJORITY IN THE ALTHING. BECAUSE THE GOVERNMENT IS COMMITTED TO A DECISION BEFORE NEXT ELECTIONS, AND BECAUSE IT CANNOT AGREE TO A DECISION THE ALTHING WOULD SUPPORT, A GOVERNMENT CRISIS IS, IN HANSEN'S VIEW, QUITE PROBABLE. HE ADMITS THAT THERE ARE PRESSURES FOR COMPROMISE WITHIN THE

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GOVERNMENT WHICH ARGUE AGAINST A CRISIS. MANY ELDER POLITICIANS IN THE PROGRESSIVE PARTY, HAVING ALWAYS BEEN IN OPPOSITION BEFORE, WILL GO A LONG WAY TO MEET THE DEMANDS OF THE COMMUNISTS SIMPLY IN ORDER TO RETAIN GOVERNMENTAL POWER. THE COMMUNISTS THEMSELVES ARE UNLIKELY TO COMPROMISE, YET THE TWO COMMUNIST MINISTERS ARE THEMSELVES SPLIT; THE FISHERIES MINISTER IS LIKELY TO FAVOR AT LEAST SOME COMPROMISE BECAUSE OF HIS

VIEW ON THE UTILITY OF THE COMMUNISTS' HANGING ON IN A NATO GOVERNMENT. HANSEN BELIEVES THAT SENTIMENT FOR KEEPING THE BASE, AS EVIDENCED BY THE SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN, IS GROWING, AS ARE PRESSURES FOR DISPOSING OF THE QUESTION IN A RELATIVELY SHORT TIME. HE SEES SOME PARALLEL BETWEEN THE PRESENT

DIVISIONS IN ICELAND AND THE SCHISMS WHICH DEVELOPED IN NORWAY DURING THE DEBATE OVER COMMON MARKET MEMBERSHIP: THE SITUATION IS ONE WHICH THE POPULACE CANNOT LIVE WITH INDEFINITELY.

4. MEANWHILE, IN HANSEN'S VIEW, THE DISCUSSIONS WITH THE US STILL HAVE AN UNREAL CHARACTER, SINCE THE ICELANDERS ARE SIMPLY TALKING WITHOUT SAYING WHAT THEY WANT. THE FUTURE OF THE BASE WOULD BE IN JETPARDY IF THE US WERE TO INSIST ON MAINTAINING THE STATUS QUO, BUT HANSEN REITERATED HIS BELIEF THAT IF THE ISSUE WERE TO BE ACTED UPON BY THE PRESENT ALTHING THE VOTE WOULD BE TO RETAIN THE BASE WITH ONLY "MINOR" REVISIONS, SUCH AS REDUCING THE NUMBER OF MILITARY PERSONNEL AND SEPARATING MILITARY FROM CIVILIAN FACILITIES. ASKED WHAT HE THOUGHT OUR POSTURE SHOULD BE, HANSEN ADVISED THAT THE US SIMPLY WAIT AND NOT BE TOO ACTIVE AT THE MOMENT.

5. AS FOR NORWEGIAN INFLUENCE, HANSEN, LIKE FRYDENLUND, IS QUITE CERTAIN THAT NORWAY HAS GOTTEN ITS MESSAGE ACROSS TO ICELANDIC OPINION, BOTH THROUGH THE NOW-PUBLICIZED MEMORANDUM OF LAST SEPTEMBER AND AS A RESULT OF THE RECENT SIMINARY IN WHICH HE PARTICIPATED. HE THINKS IT WOULD BE A MISTAKE FOR NORWAY TO DO ANYTHING MORE AT THIS TIME. THE ALTHING WILL INSIST ON MAKING AN "ICELANDIC DECISION" AND WOULD REACT AGAINST ANYTHING PERCEIVED AS "PRESSURE" FROM ABROAD.

6. COMMENT: BOTH FRYDENLUND AND HANSEN SEEM CAUTIOUSLY SECRET

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OPTIMISTIC THAT THE CRISIS WILL PASS WITHOUT LOSS OF THE BASE OR SERIOUS DAMAGE TO US CAPABILITIES THERE. THOUGH NEITHER OFFERED A CLEAR IDEA OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER, AS THEY THINK LIKELY, THE ICELANDIC GOVERNMENT FALLS,

BOTH SEEM CONVINCED THAT TIME IS ON THE SIDE OF THE US.

7. ALSO OF INTEREST IS THE CHANGED MOOD OF MY ICELANDIC COLLEAGUE, AMBASSADOR JONSSON. A MONTH AGO, HE SHOWED CONSIDERABLE CONCERN FOR THE FUTURE OF THE BASE, BUT SINCE HIS RETURN FROM FRYDENLUND'S VISIT HE IS MORE OPTIMISTIC. HE TOLD ME THE SIGNATURE CAMPAIGN WAS THE TURNING POINT AND THAT HIS GOVERNMENT NOW REALIZES THAT A MAJORITY OF THE PEOPLE FAVOR RETENTION OF THE BASE. HE IS VERY UNCERTAIN ABOUT TIMING AND SAYS NO ONE IN ICELANDIC

GOVERNMENT KNOWS EITHER
WHEN A SOLUTION MAY BE FOUND.
IN CONTRAST TO FRYDENLUND AND HANSEN, AMBASSADOR JONSSON
DOES NOT SPEAK OF THE PROBABILITY OF A GOVERNMENT
CRISIS. RATHER, HE SPEAKS OF "INDICATIONS" THE COMMUNISTS
SEEM TO BE GETTING "ORDERS" THAT THEY OUGHT TO STAY IN
THE GOVERNMENT, AND SAYS THIS POINTS TO A POSSIBLE COM-
PROMISE ON THEIR PART. SPEAKING OF FRYDENLUND'S VISIT,
JONSSON SAID THERE WERE THREE NORWEGIAN JOURNALISTS ON
HIS HEELS AT ALL TIMES AND THAT IT WOULD HAVE BEEN FATAL
FOR HIM TO HAVE GOTTEN INTO PUBLIC DISCUSSIONS OF KEFLAVIC.
JONSSON DOES, HOWEVER, CONFIRM THAT FRYDENLUND MANAGED
TO DISCUSS THE SUBJECT PRIVATELY.
BYRNE

NOTE BY OC/T: DISSEMINATION COORDINATED WITH S/S-O, MR. KURZE
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